

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL MILAN

TO AMEMBASSY ROME

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 4620

S E C R E T MILAN 0645

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, IT

SUBJECT: MILAN PUBLIC SECRETARY SITUATION

REF MILAN 0644

1. IN LIGHT OF SERIES OF INCIDENTS IN MILAN IN PAST FEW MONTHS
CULMINATING IN SEVERAL HOURS OF RIOTING MARCH 15, I MET
WITH A SENIOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SECURITY OFFICER
STATIONED IN MILAN ON MARCH 16 TO REVIEW SITUATION.
HIS VIEWS ARE SYNTHESIZED BELOW.

2. THE FIRE BOMBING AND WINDOW SMASHING RIOT OF
MARCH 15 IS SIMPLY LATEST MANIFESTATION OF INCREASING
STREET VIOLENCE. THE GROUP WAS COMPOSED OF YOUNG MEN
IN THE 18 - 24 YEAR AGE BRACKET WITH NO PARTICULAR
POLITICAL AFFILIATION BUT CLEARLY ON THE LEFT. IT WAS
PROBABLY NOT A PREMEDIATED ACT ALTHOUGH AT ITS HEIGHT
THERE MAY HAVE BEEN AS MANY AS 8,000 DEMONSTRATORS INVOLVED.

3. AT THE ROOT OF THIS GROWING PROBLEM IS THE VACUUM
OF GOVERNMENT IN ROME. LOCAL POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES
ARE ADEQUATE TODAY TO REPRESS THIS TYPE OF VIOLENCE.
BUT ROME REFUSES TO AUTHORIZE THE ACTION. CABINET MIN-
ISTERES FEAR THAT THERE WILL BE DEATHS AND WANT AT ALL

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COST TO AVOID THEM. THEY TEMPORIZE, AGREEING THAT

ACTION MUST BE TAKEN BUT SAYING THAT THE SOCIALIST CONGRESS, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS AND NOW THE DC CONGRESS MUST BE CONCLUDED FIRST.

4. YET EACH PASSING DAY MAKES THE TASK MORE COSTLY AND THE OUTCOME MORE UNCERTAIN. TODAY ALL THE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE AGREED IN CONDEMNING THESE RIOTS AND ASKING FOR MORE EFFECTIVE POLICE ACTION. THAT IS THE CASE NOT ONLY FOR PARTY NEWSPAPERS BUT IS ALSO REQUEST OF PARTY LEADERS IN PRIVATE. HOWEVER, WHILE THE COMMUNISTS AND SOCIALISTS CAN CONTROL A LARGE NUMBER OF THEIR SUPPORTERS TODAY, SOME HAVE DEFECTED TO THE NUMEROUS EXTREMIST LEFTIST GROUPS IN PROTEST AGAINST THE LACK OF PCI ANDPPSI MILITANCY. TOMORROW, THAT NUMBER WILL BE GREATER. AND IF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION DOES NOT IMPROVE, THE COMMUNISTS AND SOCIALISTS WILL LOSE MORE AND MORE OF THEIR BACKERS TO THE EXTREME LEFT UNLESS THEY TOO ABANDON THEIR RESTRAINT. THAT IS THE REAL THREAT AND NOT AN IMAGINARY ONE.

5. THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS BAD. THE LIRE HAS SUFFERED STILL FURTHER LOSSES. PRICES WIL INEVITABLY RISE AND STEADILY INCREASE THE SQUEEZE ON THE WORKING MAN WHO WILL BE MORE AND MORE TEMPTED BY EXTREMIST REACTIONS AND LESS AND LESS WILLING TO FOLLOW THE CAUTIOUS COMMUNIST LEAD.

6. IT IS TRUE THAT MEETING THSE RIOTERS HEAD-ON WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE CASUALTIES. THERE IS A PRICE TO PAY TO REPRESS VIOLENCE JUST AS THERE IS A PRICE TO PAY FOR TOLERATING IT. BUT AFTER THESE YOUNG MEN REALIZE THAT THEY CANNOT GO ON ABURNING AND TRASHING SPREE WITHOUT FACING A FIGHT WITH THE POLICE, THE NUMBER READY TO JOIN WILL DECLINE AND THE THREAT WILL RECEDE.

7. TODAY, IN SHORT, THE POLICE ARE READY AND ABLE TO STOP THE RIOTING NOT ONLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE FORCE BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY ALL THE POLITICAL PARTIES. YET, UNTIL THERE IS A GOVERNMENT IN ROME WITH THE COURAGE TO GIVE THE ORDER, THE
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PHENOMENON IS LIKELY TO GROW.

8. SUCH WERE THE SOBERLY ENUNCIATED VIEWS OF A SENIOR SECURITY OFFICIAL IN MILAN.FINA

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